STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF INFORMATION REVEALED IN THE PROFILE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES – REVIEWING AND EXAMINING FACEBOOK, TWITTER, LINKEDIN, GOOGLE PLUS AND MYSPACE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the usage of social networking sites by students in a private institute of business located in Auckland, New Zealand. In this respect two main areas are focused. First, this study aims to see if students who have enrolled in their postgraduate studies are using multiple social networking sites. Previous literature claimed that social networking sites such as Facebook is the most popular sites among students as compared to other sites such as Twitter, MySpace and LinkedIn. This study revealed that apart from Facebook, students are also keen to use Google Plus, LinkedIn, Twitter and MySpace. In this respect all five social networking sites are investigated. The second area of this study is to understand how these sites allow users to create their profile and the common features that allow them to reveal and share information with other participants. Results show that students are active users of their respective SNS and disclose information on their profile to show their sense of visibility to their circle of friends. Some common features in the profile of social networking sites are email address, date of birth and qualifications. They are frequently used by students. The least important features are physical address and workplace address. This study provide insight to understanding the growing trends in using different social networking sites among students and the availability of online presence.

Keywords: Social networking sites, students, profile, New Zealand
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INTRODUCTION

The popularity of social networking sites (SNS) is on the rise and this is because of the advancement in Web 2.0 technologies which has enhanced the usage of these sites. Moreover, social networking sites have moved from niche phenomenon to mass adoption (Gross & Acquisti, 2005). A recent study conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project Surveys (2013) revealed that 42% of adults use multiple social networking sites, but Facebook remains the platform of choice followed by LinkedIn, Pinterest and Twitter. LinkedIn is especially popular among college graduates, Pinterest is popular among female users, and twitter is more popular among younger adult. More recent statistics by EBizMBA (2014), an online e-Business guide revealed that the top five social networking sites are: Facebook (900 million active users), Twitter (310 million), LinkedIn (255 million users), Pinterest (250 million users), and Google Plus (120 million users).

The popularity of social networking sites has increased because they are easy to navigate and with no prior knowledge anyone can access these sites. According to Girard and Bertsch (2011) the benefit of SNS such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter is to connect 'people to people and facilitating coordination, communication and collaboration' (p.98). The participants can communicate with each other and this facilitates networking and meeting new people who are part of the extended network (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Similarly, by connecting to each other users can share common interest and ideas; and even express their views on products/services (Kwon, Min, Geringer, & Lim, 2013). Furthermore, by revealing their personal information on the profile space users also allow other people to view the content (such as status, interest and photos) about themselves. Social networking sites provide some common features for users to share their personal profile. A typical feature includes name, age, sex, location and listing of favorite movies, TV shows, and hobbies (Ross, nd).

Previously SNS profiles were basically static in nature, using only texts and were updated by the profile owner (Ellison & Boyd, 2013), whereas now the profile has multiple channels where users can contribute to the

profiles of their friends. Because of the advancement in technology the profiles used in social networking sites are more dynamic with a combination of content provided by the users, content provided by others (such as tagged features), system-provided contents (such as activities on third-party sites) and activity reports such as creating and joining a specific group (Ellison & Boyd, 2013). Research shows that most popular information included in social networking profiles are date of birth, educational information, personal interests, real name, email address, another name, personal photo, address and phone number (Jabr, 2011). For instance, information students tend to put on their Facebook profile are image, birth date, cell phone number, and personal address (Gross and Acquisti 2005).

The main purpose of this research is to investigate how students' community in a New Zealand private institute reveal their personal information on the profile. In this respect we identify five social networking sites – Facebook, Google Plus, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace and compare with previous studies. The research further investigates to understand the behavioural pattern of these students in selecting these five sites. The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. In the first two sections we review the relevant literature based on multiple social networking sites used by adult students and their preferences. The results of the study is presented under the discussion and findings followed by the conclusions and a set of recommendations for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature is sought based on two criteria: first only those literatures are taken into consideration where more than two SNS are used. Secondly, since this research is based on students' usage of social networking sites, most of this research is conducted in higher studies. This has narrow down our search to concentrating into few common usages of social networking sites in educational institutions. This further assists us in comparing users' profile in these sites. The following table shows the literature based on more than two SNS used in the research.

Table 1 Selected literature Review

Literature	Research in more than 2 SNS
Wild, Cant, & Nell (2014)	Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube
Ezumah (2013)	Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn
Kwon, Min, Geringer, & Lim (2013)	Facebook, Twitter, Blogs
Iordache & Lamanauskas (2013)	Facebook, Google +, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter
Stanciu, Mihai, & Aleca (2012)	Facebook, MySpace, Hi5, Twitter
Donde, Chopade, & Ranjith (2012)	Facebook, Google +, LinkedIn, Twitter, Yahoo
Kiser & Porter (2011)	Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn
Jabr (2011)	Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn
Benson, Fllipaios & Morgan (2010)	Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn
This study, 2014	**Facebook, Google +, LinkedIn, Twitter, MySpace**

Wild, Cant, and Nell (2014) conducted a research with South African Students. The authors provide five popular social media networking systems used by students in order of popularity. They are: Facebook, Twitter, Google +, LinkedIn and Pinterest. The result revealed that social media is mostly used for social purposes rather than educational purposes.

Ezumah (2013) investigated the reasons for using social networking sites by college students in the United States. The results revealed that Facebook is a preferred site followed by Twitter. LinkedIn was the least popular site among students. On the other hand MySpace was rarely visited by participants. Although, LinkedIn is a professional networking site and gives potential benefits with employment and internship opportunities, it was not voted as a popular site.

Similarly, Kwon et.al (2013) also revealed that majority of students preferred Facebook followed by Twitter and Blogs. Johnston, Chen, & Hauman (2013) revealed that Facebook and Twitter are two social networking sites that have become increasingly popular among university students. On the other hand, Iordache and Lamanauskas (2013) examined the opinion of Romanian students on social networking websites. The results show that most frequently used and most popular social networking sites are Facebook, You Tube and Google Plus. The same study also revealed that the most important reasons for using these sites are communication, learning and exchanging information, photos & videos and searching for friends. Stanciu, Mihai and Aleca (2012) also conducted a research on Romanian higher education and their results revealed that social networking sites have become very popular among students. In this respect Facebook is the most preferred way to communicate, collaborate and share knowledge with teachers. Popularity of Facebook as a means of communication among students is also revealed in the study of Johston, Chen & Hauman (2013). They also revealed that Facebook is more dominated and popular than Twitter. Research also suggested that students tend to disclose more personal information on Facebook then other means of communication (Hew, 2011). This could be due to the popularity of Facebook among students, and also peer pressure could be an influencing factor for students (Gross & Acquisti, 2005).

On the other hand Donde, Chopade and Ranjit (2012) examined the important of brand image among students in India. They revealed that most students have their profile on Facebook as compared to other social networking sites such as Google Plus, LinkedIn and Twitter.

Kiser and Porter (2011) investigated how university students use social networking site and how students felt these sites should be utilized. The results revealed that Facebook is the most used social networking site followed by MySpace, Twitter and LinkedIn. The reason for giving low weightage to LinkedIn is due to the age of participants (18-25) and that all participants were undergraduates. On the other hand Jabr (2011) investigated the important factors that students revealed in the profile of social networking sites. In this study 'date of birth' was given the most important factor followed by 'education' and 'personal interest'. In the similar study it was revealed that privacy is not that of a strong factor inhibiting SNS. Moreover, the profile information helps users to project their image and help users to recognize others to the rest of the social network (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). While comparing different social networking sites Benson, Filippaios and Morgan (2010) conducted a study in social media with business students in the United Kingdom. The study revealed the key differences among undergraduate and postgraduate students in terms of gender, program and age. In this study Facebook was voted by undergraduate students to keep in touch with friends. On the other hand postgraduate students were keen to use Facebook for socializing and LinkedIn for finding jobs and business connection. Additionally, the results also revealed that MySpace is more for leisure and LinkedIn is more for career opportunities.

Prior literature (see table 1) suggested that SNS such as Facebook and Twitter are the most frequently used SNS as compared to MySpace, Google Plus and LinkedIn. This is due to the popularity of both Facebook and Twitter among young adults. Although, majority of prior studies have focused on four SNS, this study emphasized on five SNS (Facebook, Google Plus, LinkedIn, Twitter, and MySpace) to ascertain the popularity of social networking sites among students. Additionally, this study also examined important information revealed by students on the profile of these five social networking sites.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to examine the usage and information revealed on social networking sites by students in a private institution located in Auckland, New Zealand. The research questions are:
1. What social networking sites are used by students?
2. What information students include in their SNS profile?
3. How frequently students update their profile in social networking sites?

Based on the above main research questions, we also investigated the demography of students based on age, gender, programmed enrolled in and time spent in using the internet. This also helped in analysing the correlation between the demographic features and the usage of social networking sites.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection and instrument

This study is quantitative in nature. The survey questionnaire was sent to each participant using Survey Monkey software. This software was easy to administer as it allowed monitoring the number of participants responding to the questionnaires. The data retrieved from the survey monkey was transferred directly to statistical software (SPSS ver.21) for further analysis. The survey questionnaire is divided into two sections. The first section is about the demographic details asked for students' age, gender, level of studies and frequency of internet access. The second section addressed three research questions based on students' usage of SNS, information students included in their profile, and frequency of updating profile setting. The participants were asked to tick the right boxes in the survey form. Only complete survey questionnaires were taken into consideration. Out of 109 responses 81 usable data were used

Participants

The participants were postgraduate students from a private educational institution located in Auckland, New Zealand. The majority of students were adult ranging from 21-30 years old and studying in their MBA and postgraduate diploma programmes. Most of the postgraduate students were targeted as they were the major intake during the time of survey in July 2013. In terms of country of origin, most of these students were from India (49%), followed by South Korea (21%) and China (17.3%). The 'other' category was the remaining of 12.3%. In terms of gender distribution most of them were male. For this reason our findings and discussion is more focused on overall responses from students rather than distribution of gender.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Popular social networking sites used by students

Figure 1 shows the most popular SNS used by adult students. Facebook was ranked first (91%) and most popular as almost each student has Facebook account. This is followed by Google Plus (80%), LinkedIn (74%), Twitter (71%), and MySpace (66%). Literature also suggests similar finding in which Facebook being ranked first world wide and popular among students (Ezumah, 2013, Kiser and Porter, 2011; Jabr, 2011; Benson et.al, 2010).

Figure 1: Five SNS
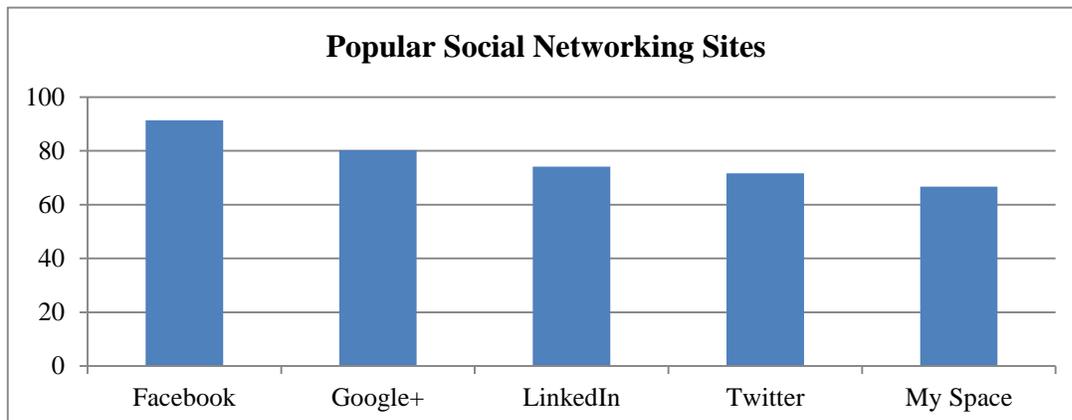
Google Plus was launched in 2011 and was not included in the previous study (Ezumah, 2013). However, LinkedIn was also launched in 2011 and included in the previous study (Ezumah's (2013) but was not rated as popular compare to other sites. The reason for the popularity of Google Plus and LinkedIn in this study could be that the respondents are adult students; especially as LinkedIn is gaining popularity due to the fact that this site provides networking and has the potential for benefiting people professionally (Ezumah, 2013). Another interesting observation noted in this study is that since most students surveyed are mature and in their postgraduate studies Google Plus and LinkedIn sites are more popular only after Facebook. Unlike other studies (Kiser & Porter, 2011) majority of students were undergraduate and ranked Twitter and MySpace after Facebook. In this study, however, we find that Google Plus has gained wide popularity (80%) and is just slightly behind Facebook (91%).

Information revealed in the social networking profile

In terms of information revealed in the profile, students ranked the options as shown in Table 2. Email address is ranked highest (69.1%) followed by date of birth (66.6%), educational qualifications and providing real name (61.7%), personal photos (54.3%), and personal interests (51.8%). On the other hand physical address and workplace address were given least preference in users' profile. This could be due to security reasons.

Table 2: Profile Information

| Answer options	Percentage	Response
Email address	69.1	56
Date of Birth	66.6	54
Qualifications	61.7	50
Real name	61.7	50
Personal photos	54.3	44
Personal interests	51.8	42
Workplace details	30.8	25
Mobile phone	27.2	22
Designation	25.9	21
Physical address	11.1	9
Workplace address	9.9	8
The calculation is based on 81 respondents		

Table 2 further examined to see if information revealed by users is similar in different SNS. In this respect a cross tabulation is used between profile information and SNS (see Figure 2). Result shows that majority of students have given importance to 'email address' (69%) as a first preference in the profile of Facebook, Google +, LinkedIn, Twitter, and My Space. With Facebook, Google Plus and Twitter, students voted 'Date of birth' (66.6%) and 'qualifications' (61.7%) as the second and the third most preferable information revealed after 'email address'. The findings also revealed that information like 'physical address' (11%) and 'workplace address' 9.9%) are the least important profile information in all five SNS.

On the other hand, profile information such as 'qualifications' seemed to be second priority for students who are using LinkedIn as compared to other SNS. LinkedIn is more for job search and career opportunity and enable to establish contacts for professional development.

MySpace was ranked last in this survey. Information on 'date of birth' is given the second priority in the profile and is only next to 'email address'.

The graphical presentation of all five SNS is shown below.

Figure 2: Revealing information on the profile of five SNS
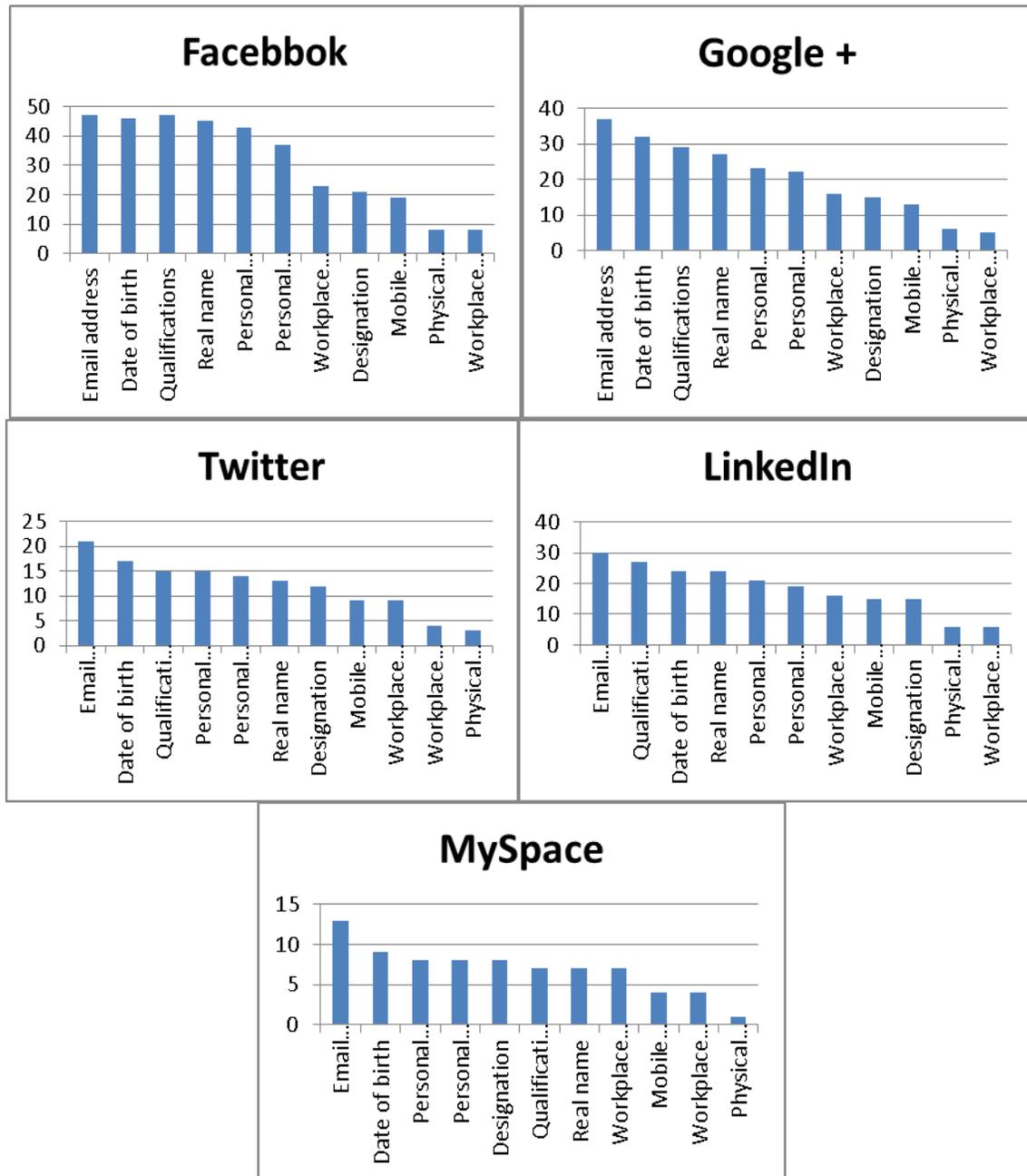
5.3   Frequency of updating information in the profile

Respondents were asked to indicate how often they update their profile in the SNS. Figure 2 shows that most students update their profile on a monthly basis (35.8%) followed by yearly (22. 2%). Only few students never update their profile (9.9%).

Figure 3: Frequency of updating information in the profile
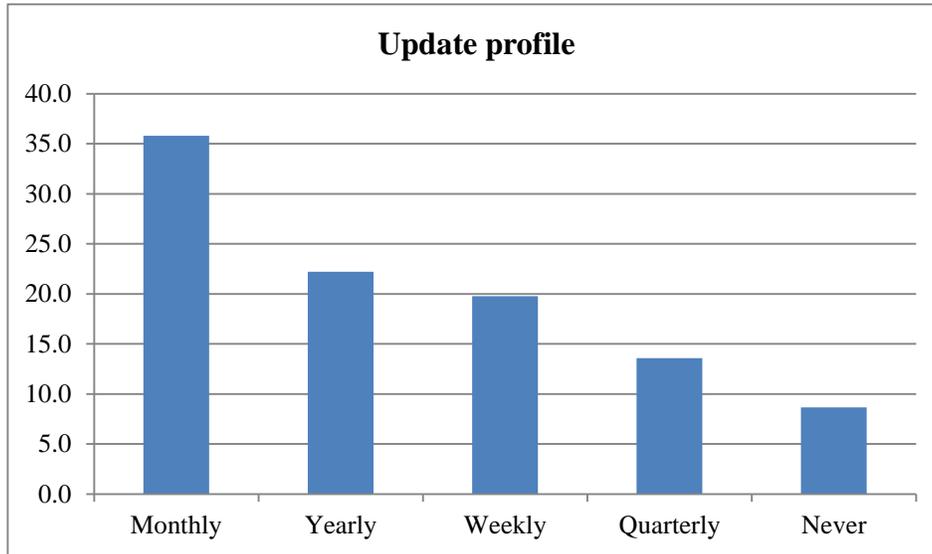
5.4 General views on SNS based on responses

Our study also examined the opinion of students on their use of SNS. Their responses are given below:

Table 3: Students' opinion on the usage of SNS

Opinion about the following statements	Response	Percent
I will keep on using social networking sites	77	95
It keeps me away from real friends	68	84
I am concern about privacy issue	68	84
I am not comfortable with negative comments and messages	62	77
It makes me lose precious time	55	68
I am concern about losing personal identity	55	68
People using social networking sites are trust worthy	54	67

- 95% preferred to carry on 'using social networking sites'.
- 84% believed that SNS 'keeps them away from real friends' and they were 'concern about the privacy issue'
- 77% were 'not comfortable with negative comments and messages' posted in SNS.
- 68% believed that by using SNS they 'lose precious time' and also concerned about 'losing personal identity'.
- 67% believed that SNS are trust worth

The above statistics revealed a general view on students' opinion on using SNS. However, regardless of how much time students spent in SNS there are other implications that could arise from this study.   For instance students are

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concerned about 'privacy issue', 'negative comments posted on SNS', 'losing personal identity' that might affect their daily life.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study provides insight into five social networking sites. In order of importance and popularity they are: Facebook, Google Plus, LinkedIn, Twitter and MySpace. Although, it is not surprising to note the importance and popularity of Facebook among students over other SNS which is synchronised by previous studies, other sites are equally important based on the context of the type of networking environment they give the users. Since this study was conducted on adult students the importance of Google Plus and LinkedIn were given more importance than Twitter and Myspace. In terms of information revealed in their profile, students voted 'email', 'date of birth', 'qualification', 'real name', 'personal photos' as most important features in all five SNS. On the other hand 'physical address' and 'workplace address' were given least important features in the profile of these SNS.   The features of both Google Plus and LinkedIn give advantages to those who are at the stage of exploring their job prospective and professional development. This is also ascertaining when the profile information was cross-tabulated with SNS. The results show that students using LinkedIn voted 'qualifications' very important feature only after 'email address'. In general, students update their profile mostly on a monthly and/or yearly basis.   This research gives a foundation to further investigate different social networking sites and importance of information revealed on the profile of these SNS.

LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations noted in this research. Majority of participants were students studying in postgraduate level and were adults between the ages of 21 – 30. More data sample from different levels would yield significant result. Also, since the trend for using social networking is increasing a comparative analysis among different profile settings would give a better measurement into current research. In this respect, other important features such as 'An avatar', 'Wall', 'Timeline' and 'Contact list' could add interesting observation on the profile pages of social networking sites.

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